What is claimed is:

1. An authentication method, comprising;

(a) generating a plurality of authentication tags for a message, each of said plurality of authentication tags reflecting a different authentication strength; and

(b) transmitting said plurality of authentication tags in association with said message to at least one receiver.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein one of said plurality of authentication tags is generated using a hash-based message authentication code algorithm.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein one of said plurality of authentication tags is generated using a universal message authentication code algorithm.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein one of said plurality of authentication tags is generated using a partial message authentication code algorithm.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein two or more of said plurality of authentication tags are generated using a nested structure that includes a plurality of inner functions that are each operative on a particular collection of message parts to produce a plurality of intermediate hash results, wherein a plurality of distinct combinations of one or more of said plurality of

intermediate hash results are used by an outer hash function to produce said two or more authentication tags.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said plurality of authentication tags are appended to said message.

7. An authentication method, comprising:

(a) generating a plurality of collections of parts of said message;

(b) processing each of said plurality of collections of message parts using a respective inner hash function to produce a plurality of intermediate hash results;

(c) processing a plurality of distinct combinations of said plurality of intermediate hash results using an outer hash function to produce a plurality of authentication tags; and

(d) transmitting said plurality of authentication tags in association with said message to at least one receiver.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein said plurality of collections of parts of said message are distinct.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein a collection of parts of said message is a collection of bits.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein a single inner hash function is used to create said plurality of intermediate hash results.

11. The method of claim 7, wherein two inner functions are used to produce a first and a second intermediate hash result, wherein said first intermediate hash result is processed using an outer function to produce a first authentication tag, said second intermediate hash result is processed using said outer function to produce a second authentication tag, and said first and second intermediate hash results are processed using said outer function to produce a third authentication tag.

12. An authentication method, comprising:

(a) receiving a plurality of authentication tags;

(b) selecting one of said plurality of authentication tags; and

(c) authenticating a message associated with said plurality of authentication tags using said selected authentication tag.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein an authentication tag is selected based upon a desired authentication strength.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein an authentication tag is selected based upon a performance level.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein an authentication tag is selected based upon a processor load.